

Creating Learning Objectives

It is essential that learning objectives be written from the learner's perspective, not the educator's view. These objectives should clearly state what a participant will know or be able to do as a result of attending an event or session.

Step 1

Learning objectives typically complete a statement. The statement links the event to the participants.

Example:

At the end of this session, participants will be able to....

Upon completion of the conference, participants should be able to....

Step 2

Connect the statement created in the previous step to an action verb. This word represents what the participant will be able to do or the action they will be able to undertake. Avoid using vague or abstract words such as believe, value, appreciate, etc.

Example:

Assess	Analyze	Compare
Demonstrate	Diagnose	Differentiate
Explain	Establish	Identify
Integrate	Manage	Organize
Plan	Recommend	Select

For a more complete listing, please refer to List of Verbs for Formulating Educational Objectives.

Step 3

End the sentence with the details of what the participant will be doing when they are demonstrating the action. The detail should be specific and refer to the outcome of the learning objective.

Some Examples of Completed Learning Objectives

Personal Knowledge Management

At the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Identify skills related to the creation and use of knowledge that is relevant and important to them (and those that are not)
- Describe the knowledge transfer/translation process when dealing with information
- Apply methods that will allow for the creation, gathering, distribution and use of knowledge and information

Gap Analysis

At the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Understand the difference between subjective and objective needs assessment and the importance of both
- Utilize methods to identify the gap between current and desired skill/competency level
- Access resources to assist in filling in areas where a gap in knowledge or skill has been identified

List of Verbs for Formulating Educational Objectives

The following verbs have been found to be effective in formulating educational objectives:

1. Those that communicate knowledge:

Information:

cite	identify	quote	relate	tabulate	count
indicate	read	repeat	tell	define	list
recite	select	trace	describe	name	recognize
state	update	draw	point	record	summarize
write					

Comprehension:

assess	contrast	distinguish	interpolate	restate	associate
demonstrate	estimate	interpret	review	classify	describe
estimate	interpret	review	translate	compare	differentiate
express	predict	compute	discuss	extrapolate	report

Application:

apply	employ	match	relate	sketch	calculate
examine	operate	report	solve	choose	illustrate
order	restate	translate	complete	interpolate	practice
review	treat	demonstrate	interpret	predict	schedule
use	develop	locate	prescribe	select	utilize

Analysis:

analyze	criticize	diagram	infer	question	appraise
debate	differentiate	inspect	separate	contract	deduce
distinguish	inventory	separate	contrast	detect	experiment
measure					

Synthesis:

arrange	construct	formulate	organize	produce	assemble
create	generalize	plan	propose	collect	design
integrate	prepare	specify	combine	detect	manage
prescribe	validate	compose	document		

Evaluation:

appraise	critique	evaluate	rank	score	assess
decide	grade	rate	select	choose	determine
judge	recommend	test	compare	estimate	measure
revise					

2. Those that impart skills:

demonstrate	hold	massage	pass	visualize	diagnose
integrate	measure	write	diagram	internalize	operate
project	empathize	palpate	record	listen	

3. Those that convey attitudes:

acquire	exemplify	plan	reflect	transfer	consider
modify	realize	revise			

These words are better avoided:

Those that are often used but are open to many interpretations:

appreciate have faith in know learn understand believe

WRITING LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Every decision you make about your lecture/workshop should depend on the learning objectives for your intended audience. Learning objectives should be clearly stated for each learning activity, to inform your audience about what they should expect. Thus, the success of your lecture/workshop will be measured by how well you achieve these objectives.

A learning objective should be specific, short-range, and relatively concrete. It is not a mere description of the content of your presentation, but instead outlines what a learner will be able to *do* differently (what learner behaviour will change) if they attend your presentation.

One good way to state learning objectives is to begin with the phrase “At the end of this lecture/workshop, the learner will be able to...” This phrase is followed by an “action” verb that describes what the learner will be able to *do* differently.

Learning objectives can focus on **knowledge, skills, attitudes, and practice** (long-term future behaviour). For objectives relating to knowledge, “action” verbs could include: list, describe, explain, identify, categorize, document, etc. If the objectives are loftier, aiming for an ability to critically analyze knowledge, the verbs could include: debate, critique, distinguish, compare, evaluate, etc. For objectives relating to skills, the verbs could include: solve, demonstrate, operate, supervise, diagnose, etc. For objectives relating to attitudes, the verbs could include: accept, value, support, resist, consider, manifest care or concern about, etc.. For objectives relating to practice, the verbs are similar to those for skills, but the focus is on long-term behaviour.

It is also useful to specify the expected performance levels and conditions for each objective. For example, a brief workshop on psychotherapy would unlikely lead to a complete mastery of skills. However, it might lead to an awareness or appreciation of the skills, or competence in a specific component or skill.

Here are some examples of effective learning objectives written for a recent conference on “Maintaining Professional Boundaries”:

1. ...participants will be able to identify at least four types of sexual misconduct.
2. ...participants will be able to describe transference, countertransference, and least three bases for the power differential in the psychotherapy relationship.
3. ...participants will be able to describe administrative safeguards which can limit the risk of unprofessional conduct.

By Ivan Silver and John Teshima

Adapted from a document entitled “Guidelines for Conducting Workshops and Seminars”
©February 2002, Richard Tiberius and Ivan Silver
Department of Psychiatry, University of Toronto